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ABSTRACT

A student of affective education describes how she helped her 8-year-old son express and discharge negative feelings resulting from the family's relocation to a new home in an unfamiliar city. Together mother and son made a book about the move. The mother designed a sequence of exercises stimulating right hemispheric, creative, and intuitive thinking; the son responded verbally, and his mother recorded his words. The exercises focused on fantasizing, brainstorming, making analogies, making metaphors, and freehand drawing. This paper mainly records the boy's response to the exercises and discloses his positive adjustment to the experience of moving. Directions for conducting the exercises are provided. (RH)

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How Is A Moving Van Like A Camel?

Creative Strategies for Helping a Child Deal With Anxiety

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How Is A Moving Van Like A Camel?

Creative Strategies for Helping a Child Deal With Anxiety

With no choice in the matter, our eight year old son left the old, comfortable house that had been his home since he was four days old. He left his life-long friend, Lisa, his big porch, and his own room. Many of his toys were given away or put in storage, as life changed dramatically for Philip. He moved nearly six hundred miles away into a three room apartment, and into a small bedroom to be shared with his eighteen month old brother. The apartment was a basement one, more afforable to his parents who were going to the university instead of to their regular jobs.

The big moving truck was an adventure, stuffed first with the old yellow Volkswagon and next with furniture, books, and clothes. Arriving at 3:00 a.m. to a dark and musty smelling apartment, however, gave hints that adventures are not always as fun as one might hope.

The big complex with 228 apartments was forbidding and not one apartment held a boy near Philip's age. The group of seven to ten year old girls at the swimming pool decided not to let Philip play with them, as the adventure continued to go downhill. A vacation bible school at a nearby church seemed like a good solution to the problem, but making new friends like the ones left behind was not easy. Philip had been a popular leader at his old school and these new kids resented his presumptuous style. The bible school only added to his feelings of alienation.

Philip never said, "I hate it here," or "I am lonely," or "I want to go HOME." Instead, he responded to the trauma of moving and the frustration and loneliness of being an outsider by bullying his baby brother and responding with open hostility to his parents. Annoying the girls at the pool who had rejected him became a favorite pastime.

I had been a teacher for several years and was now a new doctoral student in humanistic education. The highlight of my summer school work was a course called Curriculum for Creating, designed and taught by Professor Richard Konicek at the University of Massachusetts. In the class, I was learning about right hemispheric brain functioning as the center of intuition and creativity, and how it is often ignored in school curriculum.[1] Some specific suggestions and techniques for stimulating creativity were demonstrated and invented in the class and participants were required to do a project of their design, applying the knowledge gained from the class.

As a student of affective education, I was interested in experimenting with the use of this new curriculum in solving psychological problems. As a classroom teacher, I was anxious to see real application of university theory to benefit students in elementary classes. As a mother, I was deeply concerned with Philip's emotional well-being. In an effort to help my son express and discharge some of the negative feelings he was having as a result of our move, Philip became my project. Together we made a book about the move; Philip dictated and I wrote. It was not the typical language experience

manuscript, however. I designed certain problems or creative experiments using strategies from my class and then Philip elaborated on them.

Children (and adults, too) sometimes find themselves confused by or afraid of feelings they may have, unable to talk about them and acknowledge them openly. I felt that the strategies[2] for stimulating right hemispheric, creative and intuitive thinking, might be helpful in such a situation because they do not require that the individual (my son, Philip, in this case) express these feelings in an objective, logical, typically left hemispheric mode. As Philip's dictation demonstrates, the methods did not demand that he publicly own feelings. However, by providing a non-threatening means for expressing anxiety and concern, the strategies enabled Philip to do just that. This expression helped Philip demystify his feelings. He was better able to understand the feelings as related to situations and experiences and thereby gain some sense of personal power or control.

There was a dramatic change in Philip's behavior as we shared the activities together. Perhaps his increasing calmness and positive interactions with those around him were the results of having spent special time with me each day. No doubt this time was reassuring to him; however, it is my opinion and feeling that our time together was especially healing and nourishing for Philip because we were really getting to the heart of his anxiety and hostile behavior. I think this will be evident in Philip's dictation that follows.[3]

A Fantasy

DIRECTIONS: Close your eyes and relax. Breathe deeply in and out. Take your time and be with your breathing. (Pause) You are a rock in Cumberland, Maryland. Someone picked you up and threw you far away. Tell me about what is happening to you. (Note: As you read the responses, note how we begin to get closer and closer to the moving issue with repeated experiences of the fantasy.)

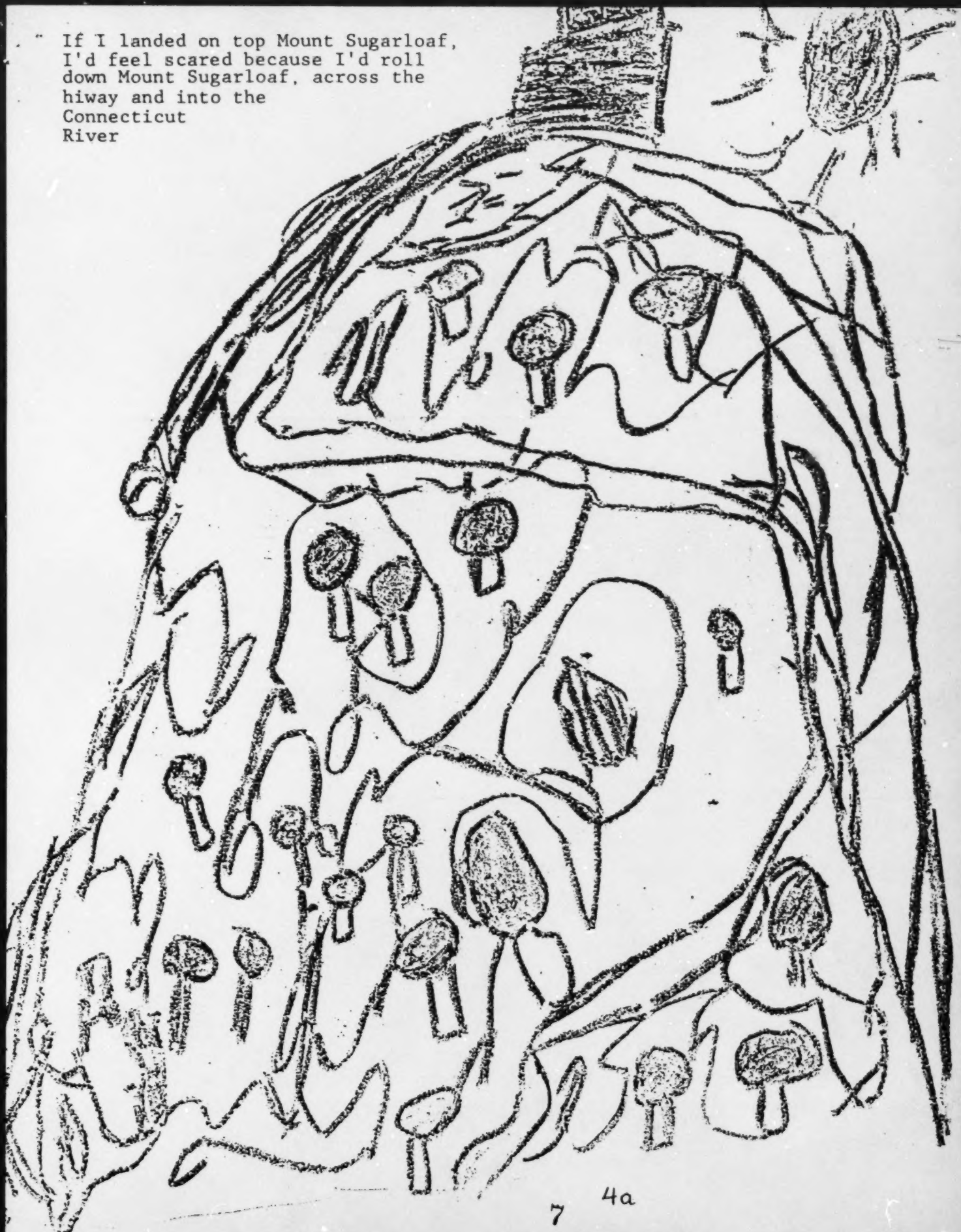
1. I landed in Pittsburgh. I do feel happy because I'm in the middle of the ballfield of the Pittsburgh Steelers and they mostly win, but when they lose, I feel sad--I start to cry.

2. I landed in the Potomac River, before it gets to the Paper Mill near Luke, Maryland, and gets polluted. I can study the river and the fish. I see rainbow fish, sunnies, bass, water snakes; mud covers me. The mud feels all gooey and icky. I feel happy because I have fish friends--a lot of fish hide under me because I'm a pretty big rock. I tell them someone threw me here. I tell the blow fish to try to blow me back to Cumberland, Maryland.

3. I broke a window and landed in a house--I feel sad because the people in the house will throw me in the garbage unless they want to keep me, no, they won't. I'd feel happy if they ever kept me.

4. I landed in Switzerland. I'd feel sad because of all the snow and I don't have anything to protect me. I'd roll down a snow bank hill and someone would pick me up and throw me back to Cumberland, and then I'd feel very, very happy! They'd throw me back to the place I was.

If I landed on top Mount Sugarloaf, I'd feel scared because I'd roll down Mount Sugarloaf, across the hiway and into the Connecticut River



5. If I landed in Massachusetts, I might feel good if they threw me in Mount Sugarloaf Apartments because Philip used to own me and I hope he owns me again. If Philip didn't get me, I'd feel no good. I'd feel no good especially if I landed in the swimming pool when they were draining it, or if I went through someone's window, I'd feel sad and they'd be mad because they'd have to pay to fix the window. I'd feel sad if I fell in the garbage dumpsters and they were emptying the garbage. If I landed on top Mount Sugarloaf, I'd feel scared because I'd roll down Mount Sugarloaf, across the highway and into the Connecticut River.

If I were a magic rock, then I would jump out of the Connecticut River, and go back to Cumberland and go back to Philip's house, and go back to Philip's room and land on his shelf. Philip would pick me up and play with me and I would feel nice because I'd be his pet rock.

Brainstorming

DIRECTIONS: See how many things you can picture and remember about your old house.

REMEMBERING PHILIP'S OLD HOUSE

A long porch

Steep hill for sliding on your sled

A lot of windows

A big attic

A big dining room

A big living room

A great big chair in the living room, two times bigger than this chair

I forget what my house looks like--

I like to play in the yard in my old house, go visit Randy, play basketball and football and baseball, ride my bike, period, that's all.

Forced Analogies

DIRECTIONS: Sometimes things that do not seem at all alike, really have some similarities. For example, a spider web is like a bridge and an engineer is like a spider. Let's think about some things that your house is like. Can you think of an animal that is like your house? (Note: Instead of insisting that Philip deal with the present situation, these house exercises gave him permission and support for mourning for the loss of his old home.)

My house is like a gigantic rattlesnake laying out long, opens its mouths--opens its doors

My house is like a set of bongos. They are both made out of wood with screws and nails. If you pound on the house it would make sounds like a set of bongos.

My house looks a little like a catbird because the concrete steps are grey like a catbird.

My house is like a sandwich because the green porch is like lettuce sticking out of the sandwich, the brown part looks like ham, and the yellow windows look like mustard.

Metaphors

DIRECTIONS: Let's think of more ways that your old house is like a sandwich.

You can't eat a house. You can't pick it up, can't squish it, can't cut it up, but someone made my house and you can make a sandwich.

If my house were a sandwich what would it be like????

All the people in the neighborhood would come to eat it.

It would be a hollow sandwich.

If a house were a sandwich you'd have to walk carefully or you'd slide on the mayonnaise.

If a house were a sandwich when you got hungry you'd eat a room.

If a house were a sandwich, the roof would get soggy when it rained.

If a house were a sandwich, you'd show you liked it by eating it.

If a house were a sandwich and you wanted to clean it, you'd lick it.

If a house were a sandwich, you could sleep between the lettuce and the bologna so you could have a midnight snack.

If a house were a triple decker sandwich, three families could live in it.

(Note: This exercise allowed Philip to remember his house, but also to be silly with the remembering. Silliness and laughter can be very therapeutic.)

A moving truck is like an elephant that moves things when it gets mad.

7a

More Metaphors

DIRECTIONS: Let's play the metaphor game again. Think of something that is like a moving truck. (Note: In this exercise, we are gradually taking Philip's attention from his old home to the move.)

A moving truck is like a buffalo herd because they always move to a new patch of grass.

A moving truck is like a bird because it moves south and north. When it's cold in the winter, it moves south and when it gets too hot in the south it moves back north for summer.

A moving truck is like Indians because they move to new hunting grounds.

Moving is like elk because they move down to lower elevations so they'll have food to eat.

A moving truck is like an elephant that moves things when it gets mad.

A moving truck is like a kangaroo because it moves its babies in its pouch.

A moving truck is like a possum because it has a pouch to carry its babies in, and because it acts like it's dead like a truck when it is stalled out or doesn't have any gas.

A moving truck is like a camel that carries things on its back for Arabs.

Moving Is Like Swimming--Metaphors

DIRECTIONS: Philip, let's think of all the ways that moving is

like swimming. (Note: Next we compared the moving experience to one which Philip found pleasant and was involved in each day at the complex, i.e., swimming.)

You have to learn about the moving truck controls, like you have to learn the side stroke, the American crawl, the underwater swim.
You have to save your life from wrecking the big moving truck, like you have to learn life saving in swimming.
When you go up for air, you're in one place and when you dive down you're in a new place--like moving from one place to a new place.
You don't have any oxygen in the deep water; it's strange. In your new place, it's strange; you don't have the same kind of refrigerator, wallpaper, or rug like you had in your old place.
You feel fun when you're down under the water because you can see new things like you can see in your new house.
Sometimes you feel scared under water because you don't have any oxygen.
You feel scared in your new place because nobody likes you and you don't have any friends and everything is strange!

A Fantasy

DIRECTIONS: Close your eyes, lie down on the floor if you like, and breathe very slowly. Feel yourself bring in air and fill your chest. Now slowly let that air go. (Pause) You are a dandelion. You were sunny, but your hair turned white. Next the wind pulled your hair out and blew each little piece of you far away. Now you

are one of those pieces of dandelion hair. Tell me about what is happening to you.

Flying in the air was fun. I went all the way from Cumberland to Baltimore. I landed in Baltimore, right on a highway and I got run over by a car. I got squashed. "Oh no, I'm scared, I'm dying." I hope I can be rescued by someone. And then someone in a car stopped and picked me up. "Oh, this poor dandelion seed, I think I'll care for it." How happy I was, they planted me under an apple tree in their back yard. There were lots of dandelions there, too. The other dandelions saw me when I grew. They said, "You want to be friends?" I said "Sure." They said, "Let's play a game--throw our dandelion seeds." There was a whole circle of dandelions around the tree and we threw to each other.

A Fantasy

DIRECTIONS: If you were magical and could change your new place in ANY way, what would you do? (Note: Understanding that Philip is frustrated by the differences in his new home and community, the exercise empowered him and encouraged him to take charge in making changes.)

Everything would be candy, but you wouldn't get your teeth rotten and you wouldn't get too full when you ate it. After you ate it, it would reappear all the time. Everything except people would be candy. The candy would be good for babies and for cutting teeth. The candy would be good for you. It would be nutritious. I would change the

law, so kids over seven could ride mini-bikes, if they knew how to drive good. I would have solar energy instead of factories and nuclear reactors. No NUKES! (Note: A nuclear reactor plant was being planned for this area of Massachusetts.)

There would be no pollution, no matter what we did, it would disappear, even the litter would disappear. (Note: The management paid Philip to pick up litter each day in an effort to occupy his time and keep him from harassing the girls at the swimming pool.)

We would never die, no matter how big we got. When there was too many people, we would spread them over the New England area and they could go to England or Oklahoma or any place in the world they wanted to go.

Everything you wanted to get better would. Dad's lemon tree would be better. Mom's impatience would be better. Poison ivy would go away.

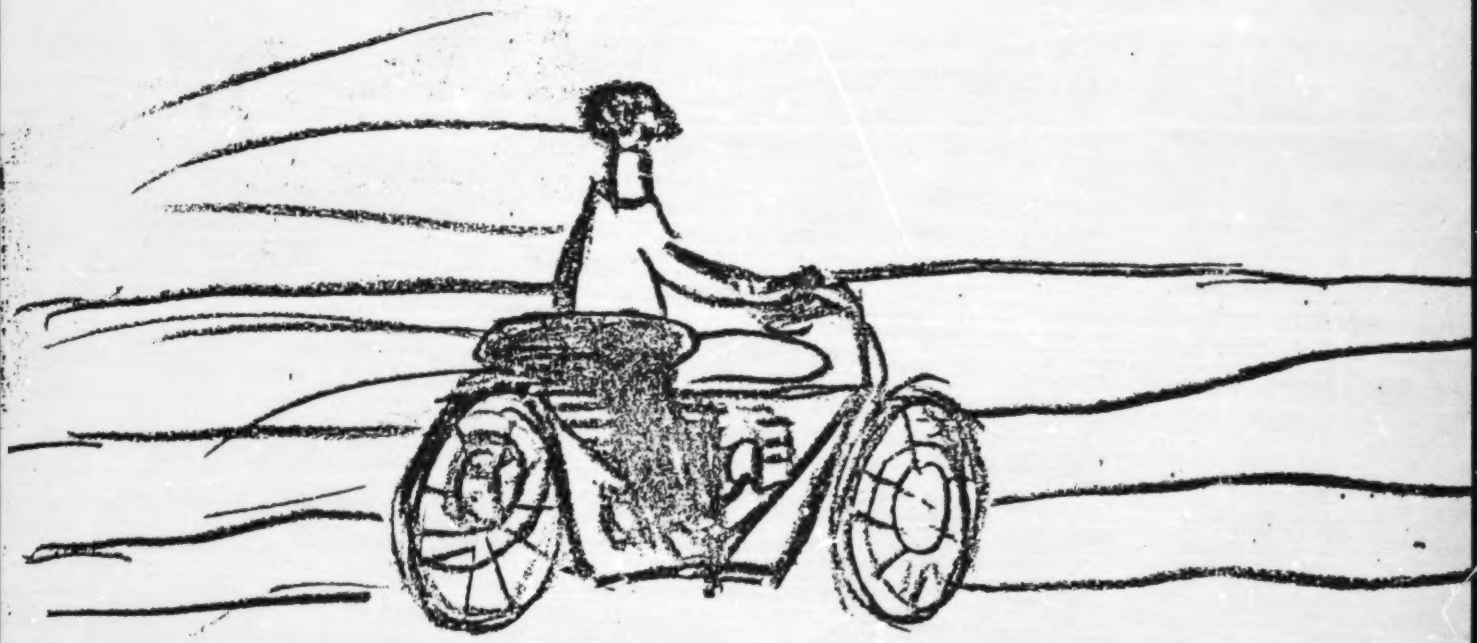
Brainstorming

DIRECTIONS: This time Philip, you are not magical. Think of some changes to your new home that might be possible in real life and that would make you happier.

I would like Arty to live here in Mount Sugarloaf Apartments, Apartment 148, with Philip Mancus. (Arty is Philip's old school buddy and close friend.)

Have Daddy's leg all better.

Have Mom not work so hard for college and school and teaching (How do you like that one, Mom?).



I can ride my bike on the hiway here, and I couldn't at home.

11 a

I'd like no one to get mad at me and me to be better.

No one would litter (unless it would be necessary and then I would pick it up).

I would like the apartments to be underground. They would have windows on the whole top. There would be grass covering them so you couldn't see in, but you could see out through the grass.

A Fantasy

DIRECTIONS: Philip, imagine what would happen, what would you do, if a new boy moved in next door. (Understanding that Philip missed his friends, especially his best friend, Arty, we explored his loneliness and a solution to it through the following what if.)

I'd be happy, very, very, very happy. He'd be seven and one-half, going on eight, like I was a month and two days ago. I'd try to make friends with him. I'd see if he went to the play yard. I'd go and climb the tree. I wouldn't do what he'd do. Then he'd say, "I bet you can't cross the monkey bars." I'd say, "I bet I can," and I would and then we'd get into it. We'd get into being "friends." We would play together, talk together, read together. We'd play racing cars and baseball and basketball and football. We would make forts and plans. I would like him because we made friends. He would like me for the same reason. We would be friends.

(Note: We had moved from a fantasized exploration of moving--the rock and the dandelion fantasies--to a more open dealing with the

subject of moving. As a result of the previous brainstorming, analogies, metaphors, and fantasies, Philip is getting clearer about the source of his frustration and more ready to face it openly. Therefore, we were ready for the next exercise.)

Brainstorming

DIRECTIONS: Philip, think of all the things you can that were or are bad about having to move. Remember the rules for good brainstorming: think of as many as you can; be as silly as you wish; and don't throw away any ideas, say them all.

Bad things about moving from Cumberland to Sunderland:

I miss my friends.

Some people aren't nice to me here.

I have a lot of litter to pick up in my new job.

Some kids at Sunderland Bible School made fun of me.

Everyone is new to me and I hardly have any friends.

Some kids on the playground said, "Oh, I can beat you up. I can run faster than you. You couldn't run an inch."

Everybody says, "Are you fast running?" and I say, "Yes." And they say, "I bet."

Everybody says, "Wait till you meet Brucie. He could beat you up. He's the best reader. He's the best drawer. He's the best runner."

My apartment is not as big as my house and I like a lot of room.

Everybody overstores my brain with Brucie.

(Note: Having had ample opportunity and reassuring invitations to express resentment over moving, it became possible for Philip to now look at the other side of the picture.)

More Brainstorming

Good things about moving:

The big moving truck was fun

I made friends with Marty, Nell, and Kurt at Bible School, pretty quick.

We got an apartment.

There are nice people who own it and take care of it, like Mr. Sheehan, and Ken and Diane and Patty.

Ken and Mr. Sheehan welcomed us.

Dad and Mom's here to comfort me. (Do you like that one, Mom?)

I like to buy fruits and vegetables and seeds at the fruit store every day.

I planted sunflower seeds and they grew very, very big.

Mr. Sheehan cares for me. He gave me a job so I could help the family.

I'm the only one working in the family.

I can ride my bike on the highway here and I can't at home.

You don't have to pay to use the pool here and you do at home.

A Fantasy Trip Inside Myself

DIRECTIONS: Philip, let's pretend that you have an inside self

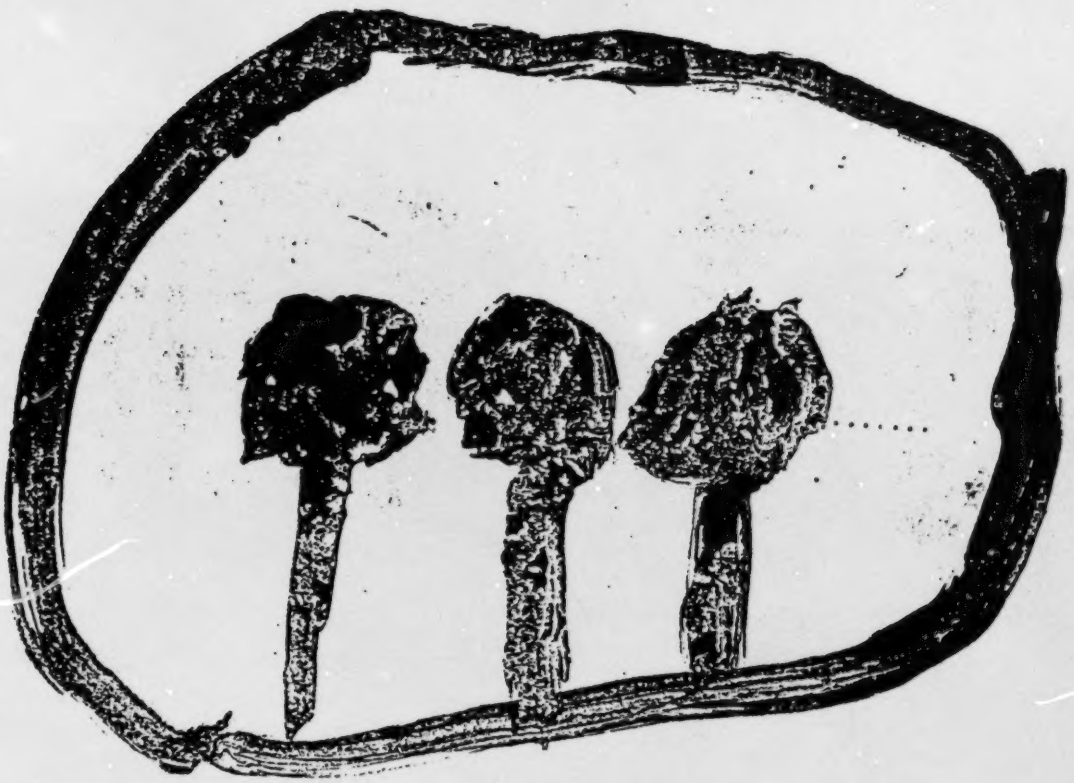
and an outside self. Can you tell me about your inside self. First, close your eyes and crawl inside yourself. Perhaps you can go inside your self slowly as you breathe air in. Once you are inside, find a place that is comfortable and look around. Perhaps you will want to move about. How do you feel and what do you see?

(Note: We had done other inside Philip fantasy trips; this was not the first. Notice reoccuring statements of the desire to have playmates. Some children at the Bible School told Philip that he had a flat face and slanted eyes, and that he had an ugly face. As a result of these creative experiences, Philip was finally able to talk about what had perhaps hurt him most.)

The person inside of me plays games with his brothers and sisters. He plays Go to the Head of the Class, and the Six Million Dollar Man, and the Adventures of Gilligan's Island. Philip-inside-of-me goes swimming in my blood, takes naps, and talks to God when he visits the heart (the heart is God's church). He asks his brothers and sisters, "What is the temperature of the blood," if they just went swimming. He asks them if they want to watch T.V. They have a cable hooked up to my brain and my brain shows them pictures. They watch the C.I.A. because they like to investigate other parts of my body. They also like to learn what is happening outside. My feelings tell them when they send it to the brain. Some feelings can be hurt and other feelings are touch, taste, see, hear. Some feelings are hurt when someone tells you you have an ugly face. The brothers and sisters inside me,

Philip's Inside Self

15 a



Broccol,
in My stomach

15 b

say, "They (the person who said it) must have an ugly face, too." When someone says my outside self has an ugly face, my inside brothers and sisters don't say anything because they feel too sad! Instead of just one person who lives inside of me, there are lots of people who live inside of me--brothers and sisters, some are boys and some are girls and some are parents. Are you ready for this, Mom? Some are alcoholics and smokers. Kind and loving people, they understand when kids make mistakes. That's all I have to say. Sometimes they don't like to watch the T.V. the kids like to watch. There are four kids, two boys and two girls and a mother and a father in my inside self. That's six people. They wish they could see the outside world, but they can see it in the T.V. in the brain and God tells them about it. They are like tiny babies in a seed.

Postscript By Philip (aged 10, who moved from Massachusetts to New Mexico six months ago)

Moving isn't so scarey. I leave some of my friends where I used to live, but I know I'll make new friends where I move. I would like to have stayed in Cumberland, Maryland, but I really liked Massachusetts, too.

Moving to New Mexico, I was absolutely scared the first day. I didn't want to go to school the first day, but I had to. And the first day I went to school, I came home and had made about six friends. I think in New Mexico, you make friends easier than Maryland or Massachusetts, but I miss my friends in New England and in Maryland.

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Footnotes

1. Research has shown that right hemispheric brain functioning is distinctively different from left hemispheric brain functioning. The left brain is the center of logical, linear, sequential thought processes. It controls language and analytical thinking. The right brain is the center of holistic thinking, i.e., thinking that need not take apart, analyze and/or label in order to comprehend. It is the center of spatial visualization and imagery; the center of body awareness, intuition, and perhaps feelings. Schools typically reward left brain responses while discouraging divergent right brain ones, e.g., day-dreaming is considered inappropriate, even bad, school behavior. The left hemisphere solves problems through logical analysis. However, the whole is often more than the sum of the parts and what is logical may really be only what has been conditioned. The right brain may escape conditioning and culturally bound language. Although speechless, it reveals itself in dreaming, fantasy, the arts, and in some verbal exercises such as free association, brainstorming and metaphor. The exercises used with Philip first stimulated right hemispheric functioning. His verbal descriptions of the experiences represent synchronization of the two hemispheres. In other words, the left brain is talking for its voiceless sister. For a thorough explanation, see Ornstein, The Psychology of Consciousness.

2. W. J. J. Gordon's book, The Metaphoric Way, and Richard de Mille's book, Put Your Mother On the Ceiling, offer guided implementation of strategies for stimulating creativity in the classroom. Also, see Bibliography.

3. As the reader reviews Philip's dictation, he/she is bound to ask, "Did this child actually dictate this?". The answer is yes. I tried to do what a good counselor does, i.e., give support and often probe. I tried to do what a good teacher does, i.e., give enough illustrations or directions that the child is motivated but not so many as to contaminate his/her work. Then, I tried to do what a good secretary does, i.e., take notes as they were actually dictated to me. I did not edit or revise Philip's words; I just recorded them for him.